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Story of the Chennai Flood Disaster of December 2015

29 Dec, 2015 [Anjana Singhwi](#) [View1988](#) [Comments 0](#)

An Eyewitness Account

Recently I returned to India from the United States of America after completing my studies at the Parsons School of Design. Divinity brought with the Chennai flood disaster, which my fourth encounter with major disasters in a life span of 23 years. I had suffered the flooding of Sandy and Irine in the highest danger zone in the City of New York but the experience of getting caught in the floods was different. The only one where my faith in humanity got restored as I saw Chennai as just one big family of strangers. Here is the story of my rendezvous flood catastrophe of December 2015.

We had planned a trip to Chennai from Tuticorin as I had to write my IELTS exam in Chennai. The flight was slightly delayed due to "weather" but we were not aware of the weather forecast in Chennai as no national news channel was covering it. Since the flight was departing anyway, everything must be alright in Chennai. During the flight over Chennai I looked out the window and I saw most of the city submerged. A minute later I thought we were having an emergency landing in water but the runway turned out to have water logging. When we landed, the aircraft was submerged in water. We could not vacate the flight as no aerobridge was provided and Spicejet was making necessary arrangements for passengers getting wet in the rain. They managed to place two stands to de-board in order to reach the bus. After we arrived at 4.30 PM, a private driver in the heavy rain. It usually takes him an hour to reach the airport but it took him three hours that day because buses were blocked and streets were flooded with unmarked dangerous potholes. We managed to reach home around 8 PM. The Ashok Nagar area was fairly dry but there was water logging when we arrived. The guest house had electricity and water running. But looking at the flooded streets we knew we should be careful.

Late at night there was heavy rainfall and the power was cut off. We hadn't anticipated any flooding in our area but we made sure to have all amenities. However, we thought the power cut would be temporary and assumed we will be fine the next day. There was heavy downpour the next morning when we woke up the water level on the street had risen up to the ankle. Within a matter of 2-3 hours the water level rose to 3.5-4 feet. We had a helper at home who was willing to go to Reliance Fresh Store nearby and get us batteries, candles and other amenities. He went in hip deep water and returned empty handed as Reliance Fresh refused to sell goods because their billing machine was broken. He asked them to generate a manual bill they refused to sell. Fortunately, there was a fruit shop right below from where we managed to get milk and some fruits and vegetables. We had only four candles at home. In the next two hours the water level rose to 5 - 6 feet and people could not walk. It was too late to get out to buy any supplies.

There was a Maruti Swift that was completely under water and a black Lancer that was floating away which crashed into the wall. My watch was on a truck standing right below which was still visible. There were no winds just rapid water flowing. Our phone batteries were almost dead. We managed to find a box full of tea lights in the house. The BSNL landline was working until early evening and then got disconnected. Fortunately, we had a fully charged power bank so we could all charge our phones. My laptop still had some battery left so I could use my MTS WIFI dongle to connect to the internet. Raina through face book and give her updates. She was our one point connection to the rest of the family. She relayed news to everyone. We somehow managed to give her updates every 2-3 hours.

The water was still running as two tanks were full upstairs. We filled in big tubs of water and managed to open the tank lids so rainwater could be used. We avoided water wastage by eating in paper plates and taking short showers. We soon realized that the water had entered our building. We had a list of helpline numbers on the Uber App and one of them was for poisonous reptiles. So I realized there was a high chance that a snake might enter the house. I immediately rolled up a towel and covered the door gap. Later that evening a stray dog got stuck on a fence and needed help. There were a few people from the fruit shop who were still downstairs closing their shop. We managed to call their attention toward the dog. A floating banana stem and tried to set the dog free from far. After a few attempts they gave up and left the dog stranded. Then two men probably evacuating their house with plastic bags on their head were nearby so we asked them for help. They said they were scared of the dog and left. Our helper went downstairs and figured that the dog was not stuck he was just scared to swim. He assessed that the dog was not a threat and it was best to leave him alone so he came back. It was mostly very quiet at night except the fact that the dog was crying all night. We had numbers including animal rescue in hand but it was of no use as there was no network connection. We were being very careful with our flowing water sounded like we were standing next to a river with a waterfall.

The next morning when we woke up the dog had left and the water level had receded by at least a feet. The fruit shop people were sta as they couldn't go back home. It was a boon because they opened up their shop and gave us some more drinking water, fruits and ve water level reduced by half he very prudently found a vegetable cart and brought out all his vegetables and fruits. People started wall buy some food. He sold a bag of 4-5 different kinds of vegetables for just Rs 100. At least people could eat something because of h around our area had bought their vegetables he pushed his cart and went to the neighboring streets to sell. It takes a lot of courage floods to help people. I think he managed to sell most of his vegetables. What a stark difference between him and the Reliance Fresh gu' rescue boats and rafts helping old people and children get to the relief camps. There were helicopters flying constantly monitoring supplying food packs. Dad had sent a very nice man to help us with food supplies and power banks. He had walked 3-4 km carrying st He mentioned that he had the spent an entire day from 7 AM until 10 PM distributing hot food to stranded people. He said he and his get food to around 6000 people that day. He mentioned that at that time there was no distinction between people of different religior status. The rich gilded in gold were standing right next to poor slum dwellers asking for food as they had lost everything. He also said bodies just floating in water. That man has done great service to the flood victims.

The water level receded to one foot. We later learned that to avert a bigger disaster of dams breaking down they opened them up an flowing towards Ashok Nagar. There was a weather forecast for more rain for the next three days and we heard that water levels migh were redirecting river water flow. Later that evening dad managed to convince us to leave the house and said he would be waiting for us the outskirts. His ex-employee worked for the municipal corporation and was part of the rescue mission providing medicines for victims. out of the apartment. The streets were so flooded that vehicles could not come into the area. So we packed a bag each and walked in kr van. From there we met dad and drove back home to safety. Thanks to his courage and quick decision making skills we averted ano stranded.

Throughout the disaster, social media and the youngsters of Chennai were of great help to the victims. Face book turned on their safet could mark themselves safe to inform worried friends and family. People opened up homes, temples, mosques, movie halls and ma Youngsters went out of their way to provide transport. People who posted about missing family members on Face book found immediate in that area and nearby who offered to go find them. So many people were found and families reunited because of social media. Nei other out. Crowd sourced safe route maps were created for evacuation. A crowd sourced document with open homes listed for victims phone numbers were provided. Although there were some ignorant people spreading rumors and causing havoc all rumors were cleared reduce the panic it had caused. People really got together to help each other out in this natural calamity. I have experienced four natural and this was probably the only one where my faith in humanity was restored. Chennai is just one big family of strangers.

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